

Chinese the Chosen

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WHEN the eye travels over a familiar scene it takes note of but few of the details. Contrary-wise, when it passes over an unusual vista, it notices all those minor matters which ordinarily escape the observation of the natives. Near home, incidents occur daily that arouse no comments from us, but that mightily attract the attention of strangers. As the progress of time and events alters the customs of a people, habitually their mental and moral range alters accordingly. The habits of one period condoned are in the next condemned. It is remarkable how rapid sometimes is the transition from approval to abhorrence. The change denotes an intellectual growth and the establishment of new institutions. Analysis of the emotions is seldom attempted; we are accustomed to accept public opinion, or what passes as such, without demur or examination. In reference to the formation of public opinion and the forces acting, we little concern ourselves. Philosophy seldom acts to show that, though custom may sanction crime, it is possible for customs to be criminal. Right and wrong are as strongly defined now as they will be a thousand years hence. There can be no medium, however we seek to nominate degrees. A lie is a lie: commercial training can find no more valid excuse for it now than could be found a thousand years ago.

Strongly in contrast to the shifting moral fabric of the English-speaking peoples, is the constant code of the conservative Chinese. Crystallized by centuries of continued customs, these people have set for themselves certain standards maintained rigidly and unswervingly. There are differing codes of honor attached to different walks of life among them, the several codes having been handed down from father to son through generations. Children

follow unconsciously the ways of their fathers and families, for the family bond is the essence of their life.

Is consistency more a feature of the Chinese system than of ours? Nature says yes, progress says no. Nature verifies it, because the questions of right and wrong are settled once and for all without equivocation and without pretense. Progress denies it because improved facilities and improved manners call for improved morals. The Chinese have not blindly followed progress, but have held closer to nature, shunning the sham and seizing the realities.

Prone as we have been to ridicule habits and customs not in conformity with our own, reflection invariably illuminates the sensibility of some of these measures. Goldsmith, imagining himself in the position of a Chinese philosopher, set down his views of English life. "Behold me then in London, gazing at the strangers, and they at me ; it seems they find somewhat absurd in my figure ; and had I never been from home it is possible I might find an infinite fund of ridicule in theirs ; but by long travelling I am taught to laugh at folly alone, and to find nothing truly ridiculous but villiany and vice." After some weeks' residence in England, the Philosopher discovers that laws and religion forbid the English to keep more than one wife, and he concludes therefrom that prostitutes are banished society. He owns himself deceived upon further finding every man keeping as many wives as he can maintain : the laws are cemented with blood, praised, and disregarded. Herein lies a chief distinction from Chinese methods. The Chinese do not make laws inconsistent with human nature ; their laws consequently are respected.

A few other national differences are mentioned. In China and Persia the rich are distinguished by their dress ; those who are possessed of much gold and silver put some of it upon their clothes ; but in England, those who carry much upon ther clothes are remarked for having little in their pockets.

Were an Asiatic politician to read the treaties of peace and friendship that have been annually making for more than a hundred years among the inhabitants of Europe, he would probably be surprised how it should ever happen that Christian princes should quarrel. Their compacts for peace are drawn up with utmost precision and ratified with the greatest solemnity; to these each party promises a sincere and inviolable obedience; all wears the appearance of open friendship and unreserved reconciliation. Yet, notwithstanding these treaties, the people of Europe are almost continually at war.

Since Goldsmith's writing the Chinese have had brought home to them the European methods of treaty-making. Mutual concessions, arranged at the cannon's mouth, resulted in the aggressor taking all conceded, but conceding nothing, as stipulated. Goldsmith's countrymen have done more to foster Chinese hatred of foreigners, mainly through the opium trade, than have all other nations combined. Repeatedly England has forced upon China obnoxious treaties in order to hold her immense revenue from the opium traffic. In that connection it may be remembered that the British East India Company made initiatory introduction of opium into China at about the time of the formation of the United States. Chinese hatred of foreigners is often spoken of as something inherent in Chinese nature. Intolerance is not characteristic of them. Their opinion of other races rests solely in the demeanor of such races. It can scarcely be expected of them to love any nation whose only object is to despoil and enslave them for commercial aggrandisement. ✓

Apart from errata existing in our social life, likely to be distinguished by a foreigner upon short residence, I have gathered a few which appeal to me as especially pitiable. I saw that the wealthy, who live in airy neighborhoods and enjoy commodious rooms at home in the city, remove during the summer season to eight-by-ten-foot rooms at the seashore or mountains, while the poor, who live closely

packed in hovels, are compelled to remain in the city ; that the wealthy have extraordinary opportunities for purchasing their supplies at wholesale rates, while the poor pay exorbitant prices, through pawnshops and instalment houses. In fact, I everywhere saw the successful man encouraged and the struggling man discouraged ; vice condoned and virtue condemned ; the old endeavoring to appear young, and the young old ; fat people desiring to be considered thin, and thin people fat ; the learned putting on the garb of ignorance, and the ignorant assuming the graces of learning ; and so we might name a long list of petty self-deceptions, practiced to the detriment of the deceivers, the which neither beget happiness nor have a logical destination.

✓ There are some small matters of courtesy, social intercourse, and festival observances, upon which the east differs from the west. Customs of essential importance, however, are generally sensibly arranged. Against the cramped foot of the Chinese woman oppose the unnatural waist-line of the English. The former practice may be unhealthy, but it is not as mischievous as the latter. Against the costume of baggy trousers, oppose the negligence of the modern woman's evening dress. Measure for measure, silencing our notions of the ridiculous, are habits and customs, which, with few exceptions, may be traced to natural followings.

✓ The Chinese look to other safeguards in commercial transactions than do we. No reliance is placed upon legal interference by their bankers and merchants, who act, contrary to our procedure, as though little good is to be expected from litigation. Their principal line of defense against fraud lies in a selection of customers. They deal only with men of known character and reputation, and in such manner as to be able to follow him into all the transactions he may undertake. Confidence between men of business is by means of this mutual knowledge thoroughly cemented. Customs which are better known to them than

any legal enactments can possibly be to Europeans, rule every deal that is doubtful. Written contracts have scarcely any place in the Chinese system, whereas they are the rule in ours.

Philosophers of progressive countries have pointed the moral of the contract habit. The "Rambler" asserts all confidence to be lost among mankind, in that no man ventures to act, where money can be endangered, upon the faith of another. It is impossible to see the long scrolls in which every contract is concluded, with all their appendages of seals and attestations, without wondering at the depravity of those beings who must be restrained from violation of promise by such formal and public evidences, and precluded from equivocation by such punctilious minuteness. Among all the satires to which folly and wickedness have given occasion, we are assured, none is equally severe with a bond or settlement.

American jurists hold the verbal construction of an agreement paramount, while in China the obvious and reasonable intention is the guide. With what reason can we test Chinese equity by our standards when they prefer the charge of perpetual injustice, worked by a system in which advantage is taken of a technicality to avoid an evident obligation?

What is most mysterious in Chinese ways would be simple enough if we could appreciate their philosophic standpoint. The fundamental principle of their life, the family bond, accounts for many apparent idiosyncracies. For instance, the family bond itself, in connection with the concomitant veneration for its heads, is sometimes ignorantly declared to be the chief fault of the Chinese. Critics, in attempting to estimate the value of their institutions, frequently judge according to a false light. Thus we are told "their educational system remains unchanged, though totally unsuited to the needs of the times." What times? Chinese reckoning of time is not our reckoning. We presume the absolute necessity of their adapting themselves to

our conditions. Our superiority in every particular is so evident as to be undoubted. Lest critics and optimists presume too far, be it remarked, apart from other decided advantages later mentioned, the family being the unit of the state, there is a collective responsibility for the behavior of each member, in consequence of which order is maintained with a minimum supervision of military and police.

✓ The Chinese, in public life, as we conceive the idea, is yet an unknown quantity. The nation does not concern itself with political affairs, any more than, on the advice of Confucius, it concerns itself with theological affairs, remarks Colquhoun. To insinuate, as does Colquhoun, that patriotism is nil among the Chinese, because they manifest little interest in public affairs, is to conclude hastily and without basis. Colquhoun is an excellent observer, but not convincing in deduction. Much of the vaunted patriotism of the western races is a species of braggadocio, by which the respective citizens hope to reflect a little greatness upon themselves in inflating that of their country. Franklin, the benevolent and patriotic, urged that few in public affairs, act from a mere view of the good of their country, whatever they may pretend. He also urged that fewer still in public affairs act with a view to the good of mankind. In this particular the Chinese, who makes no pretense of patriotism, excels us, who make the pretense without the substance. American writers assign want of public spirit as the cause of corruption in the Chinese political system; how, then, will they account for the frequent peculations and plunderings occurring under their own? Probably they will attribute it to too much public spirit! Lack of patriotism is not the reason for Chinese abstinence from political interests; it is rather that their experience has emphatically demonstrated

“How small, of all that human hearts endure,
That part which kings or laws can cause or cure.”

English passion for politics is well portrayed by the Chinese Philosopher. An Englishman, not satisfied with finding by his own prosperity the contending powers of Europe properly balanced, desires also to know the precise value of every weight in either scale. To gratify this curiosity a leaf of political instruction is served up every morning with tea ; when our politician has feasted upon this he repairs to a coffee house, in order to ruminate upon what he has read and increase his collection ; from thence he proceeds to the ordinary, inquires what news, and, treasuring up every acquisition there, hunts about all the evening for more and carefully adds to the rest. Thus at night he returns home, full of the important advices of the day : when, lo ! awaking next morning he finds the instructions of yesterday a collection of absurdity or palpable falsehood.

The operation of the Chinese government is as free as the most liberal republic. We do not find, in China, citizens constantly talking of the corruption of their officials. When they have cause for such complaint, a memorial is presented to the Emperor, and, if the complaint is justified, the official is dismissed. Uprisings and rebellions have occurred in China ; these have always been against the tyranny of the ruler, and never has a change of governmental form been even suggested. Sir George Staunton has summarized the strength of political China as follows : a government constituted on the basis of parental authority, highly estimated and extensively applied, has certainly the advantage of being directly sanctioned by the immutable and ever-operating laws of nature, and must thereby acquire a degree of firmness and durability to which governments, founded on the fortuitous superiority of particular individuals, either in strength or ability, and continued only through the hereditary influence of particular families, can never be expected to attain. ✓

Examination of Chinese history shows the fixedness of their political, economical and social systems. These have

been experimented with, adjusted and finally crystallized by centuries of acceptance. To expect them to adopt our systems, when they perceive us so ready to change from one to another, and so uncertain and contradictory in our theories, is the height of folly. Weak and unworthy their institutions may be. This they suffer in common with all nations. Each nation has its follies add weaknesses, characteristic and differing. All institutions, Chinese, English and American, must partake of the nature of the people who form them ; all are imperfect.

✓ The man of the west is still debating the merits of monarchical and republican government, of free trade and protection, of socialism and individualism, while the Chinese have settled these questions centuries ago. The theories of Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, and a host of others, were familiar to the Chinese before the birth of Christ. Some of them were tried and found wanting. We are creditably informed that Henry George's plan was advocated, put into operation, and proved utterly fallacious and worthless by a prime minister of the Sung dynasty more than a thousand years ago.

Apparently the Chinese are ahead of us in recognizing the most vital and far-reaching principle affecting the entire life of a people. They discovered, ages ago, the futility of endeavoring to mould men by means of institutions, and the correlative necessity for allowing them to form such as best fitted to their nature and environment. They have submitted to the inevitable with an enviable philosophy, and are making the best of their limited opportunities. Western nations, meanwhile, are continually striving for the unattainable ; sacrificing lives and spreading hopeless discontent in the chase of vain chimeras.

Economically, as well as socially and politically, the Chinese are not so inferior as is customarily supposed. Though progress in China appears to us at a standstill, by reason of our rapid pace, many of the products of China hold their own in the markets of the world. With primitive tools and none of the modern accessories, the Chinese

handiwork in certain departments surpasses that turned out by any European, with his improved machinery.

Naturally patient, painstaking, and by no means unintelligent, once provided with the products of our civilization, and China may readily repeat the old story of the barbarians and the Romans. The Chinese are now giving way, according to the preposterous demands of rapacious England, Germany, Russia and France. They seem cowed by the display of power represented in modern ships of war and artillery. Let them once learn the use of such weapons, let them once awaken to the full possibilities of their own numerical strength, let them once become infected with the ambitions of the west, and woe betide any opposing forces! Listen to the tale of the German triumph over Rome. Strangely familiar sound the strains of this old story: "Half the land was occupied by Roman garrisons, and, what was worse, many of the Germans seemed patiently acquiescent in their state of bondage. The braver portion, whose patriotism could be relied upon, was ill-armed and undisciplined, while the enemy's troops consisted of veterans in the highest state of equipment and training, familiarized with victory and commanded by officers of proved skill and valor. The resources of Rome seemed boundless; her tenacity of purpose was believed to be invincible. There was no hope of foreign sympathy or aid for the Germans." Behold the result! "Never was victory more decisive, never was the liberation of an oppressed people more instantaneous and complete. Throughout Germany, the Roman garrisons were assailed and cut off, and within a few weeks after Varus had fallen the German soil was freed from the foot of the invader."

Assyrian and Persian greatness yielded to Grecian and Roman greatness, and these made way for French and English greatness, which in turn are surpassed by American greatness. Each nation, having risen in power and wealth, sought to force her improvements upon other so-called barbarian nations, and succeeded so well that the pupil invariably overreached the teacher. The cycle begin-

ning in Assyria and Persia, the near neighbors of China, can be traced westward through Greece, Italy, France, England and America, leaving China the last link in a chain encompassing the world ! China, the isolated nation, the bone of contention, is at length to feel the force of western civilization. With sterling merits, and institutions which have stood the test of time, the Chinese may choose the best of the uncalled gift and easily overwhelm the givers.

Standing thus alone, and as yet uncontaminated, the title of the Chinese as a chosen people, is clear and certain. A first indication rests in their pure, original type ; unique and unexampled, in the length of their history and the greatness of their numbers. Holcombe speaks of them as an original race, unmodified and unstrengthened during thousands of years by the introduction of any other strain of blood, segregated from all the growing portions of humanity during the later centuries, and left to act and react upon themselves.

Education is more general among the male population in China than in any other country. In treating of the aspect of parental responsibility (whereby parents are rewarded or punished for the merits or misdemeanors of their offspring) and its responsibility for the universal dissemination of knowledge, it has occurred to some of our professional hair-splitters to question whether the amount of public benefit gained balances the amount of personal liberty sacrificed. What gush we endure on the score of liberty ! Is personal liberty an independent consideration ? If so, the anarchists must be right, for they represent the quintessence of personal liberty ; yet a trial of their plan has shown the folly of their claims. It must be evident that liberty is only valuable as it is accessory to either happiness or contentment. Happiness or contentment, without the aid of any considerable liberty, proves the insufficiency of that commodity.

Distribution of wealth in China is remarkably equal. The comparatively low estimate in which mere wealth is

held is a moral advantage in favor of the Chinese. To the system of clubbing together in families is to be attributed that sacred regard of kindred which operates better than a public provision for the relief of the poor, and serves to prevent unhealthy accumulations of wealth. This sharing of a man's family, direct and collateral, with his fortune, good or bad, is supposed to act as a deterrent to ambition. Actual practice does not prove this to be the case. Honor is held in high esteem by the Chinese, and the head of a numerous family, in sharing with the members, receives his reward in renewed reverence. Wealth and birth being equally impotent to effect social standing, the determining factor is the quality of the mind, or intellectual capacity. Once again the Chinese assume a more natural and impartial order, since the opportunity to acquire knowledge, and hence high rank is open practically to all the people. "By learning, the sons of the common people become great; without learning, the sons of the great become mingled with the mass of the people."

The discipline to which they are subject from earliest childhood, and the habit of controlling their ruder passions, renders crimes of violence infrequent among them. "There are fewer natural divisions among the Chinese race than are to be found in the toughest rock." The Chinese have great power of absorption and improvement, retaining through all such processes their own individuality. He readily adopts western ways, but shapes them to himself rather than being shaped by them. Altogether he has a keen sense of propriety. His vices, since vices must be, are the least harmful; his virtues valuable, and his ambitions answerable. His strong pride of race and great love of home and country contribute to his continued permanence. That he has in the past subjugated every race about him, except India, shut off by the Himalayas, and Japan beyond the seas, is proof of his national strength, when the occasion arises. Even those who criticise Chinese institutions assert the entire history of the race testifies as to its ability, force and manliness.

An American official, who inconsistently offers certain reforms, tells us that it is impossible to believe that any race so multitudinous, possessed of a history so continuous, leaders for centuries in the civilization of the world, exhibiting at present great intellectuality and an abundance of shrewd good sense, having such admirable and sturdy traits of character, such virility and force—it is impossible to believe that such a race is incompetent to manage its own affairs, and to plan and perfect any such reforms as may be desirable or necessary.

How is it the Chinese, who were the leaders of civilization for centuries, have abandoned the position? It is not because they have attained a height and fallen back. No real evidence of decay is displayed in their life, despite the caviling of the casual observer. All signs point to a gradual, consistent and healthy development, each step of which the body of the people soberly received and thoroughly assimilated. Quite a contrast is this characteristic to the wild enthusiasm and drunken depravity of most temporarily successful peoples. The Chinese have taken civilization in small doses, which, having been naturally absorbed, cause little inconvenience to established system. Hence their belief that the centre of the intellect is the stomach, is founded upon somewhat the same conclusions as lead us to name the heart as the seat of the emotions.

Every charge made against the Chinese, with the exception of a few minor ones relating to character imperfections, redounds to their credit. Their repudiation of theology promotes their unity—for schisms follow in the wake of religious discussions. Their remissness in scientific research has lost them something of elation but left them contentment. So it happens the deeper we go into Chinese history and life, the more and more convincing becomes the evidence of their favorable isolation. Favored by time, position, and environment, this wonderful race has contentedly lived to complete a cycle stretching around the world !

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